



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Main Committee

APPROPRIATION BILL (NO. 1) 2002-03

Consideration in Detail

SPEECH

Wednesday, 19 June 2002

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Katter, Bob, MP

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Mr KATTER (Kennedy) (5.46 pm)—I am very disappointed with the response by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Environment and Heritage. I may as well have not spoken at all. I quoted to her three reports. She quoted back one report to me. That report was done by a very ardent, partisan green activist. It was not a scientific report and was not accepted as such. The other three reports most certainly are scientific. One of those reports is not favourable to my argument, but they are all acceptable scientific reports. The one the parliamentary secretary is referring to is not. What is more, even if it was a scientifically acceptable report, it is one report versus three reports. I would say the three reports win, but maybe one beats three in this place; I do not know.

Switching subjects dramatically, I cannot help mentioning one other thing the parliamentary secretary mentioned. I am sorry, Parliamentary Secretary, but GBRMPA has already closed down one-quarter of the entire fishing industry. You said there are other industries there. GBRMPA has already closed down one-quarter of one of them. And tourism numbers cannot expand from the present number; in fact, the present numbers must diminish, because the number of people being allowed to go out on the reef has been reduced dramatically. The numbers of people visiting that reef are far fewer than they are anywhere else in the world, so the proposals they are putting forward are ludicrous. They are not backed by any scientific evidence.

We put to GBRMPA that, if they were allowing us to prawn or fish farm on the coast, there would be some justification for the position. But Virginia Chadwick said, 'We are all for prawn and fish farming.' I said, 'No, you are not. You have actually succeeded in closing more prawn and fish farms than we have been able to open.' She turned to her two sidekicks and asked them, 'Aren't we?' They both looked at the ground, so she just said, 'Well, we are.' In all fairness to her, I think that she would like to see us move in that direction, but that most certainly is not the position of GBRMPA and she will not be able to overcome the difficulties she has there.

Moving on, the midwest plains are in a very advanced state of erosion. This is a natural state of play. It has nothing to do with man affecting the environment—there are hardly any hard-hoofed animals on the inland plain, as you can see on the drive from Townsville to Cloncurry. I offered a bloke \$1,000 if he could count 1,000 head of cattle or sheep from the highway, and no-one has taken the \$1,000 yet. There are very few because it is a very light carrying capacity country because of the annual end-of-year drought that we have.

Every single year we have no organic matter cover, no grass cover, on any of our land in North Queensland from July or August onwards because we only have three months of rainfall and then all of the grass dies off. So very late in the year, by the end of the dry in November, we have no protection for our great inland plains country at all, and the north-west monsoons come in, usually driven by a cyclone, the sky falls and all of these areas become ripping torrents of erosion. We are not good at husbanding our land if we allow this to continue. With assiduous use of government money and an intelligent use of weirs, we feel that we can provide trees—we are taking advice from environmental agencies here—on the banks of these rivers and creeks and we can also provide pasture, which is far more valuable in holding these banks together. So, instead of every year losing probably hundreds of millions of tonnes of our beautiful black soil plains into the sea in the Gulf of Carpentaria, we can in fact protect and build them up.

On this, I must give the NHT some considerable credit, because their program of fencing off the rivers has been enormously beneficial for the environment and for the health of our rivers and also, strangely enough, quite helpful to the cattle and sheep industries as well. It has been a very good expenditure of money, and I can say that almost all of the upper Burdekin now is fenced off. That is an excellent achievement for all of the parties concerned, and I must highly praise the graziers, who have, almost to a man, participated in this venture.

I must also say that we have no timber industry in North Queensland. We have probably the best area of Australia for growing timber. The rainforest is expanding, and when we constantly hear about how many trees have been removed from the landscape we have a bit of difficulty with that. (*Time expired*)